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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 HARARE 001019

SIPDIS

NSC FOR SENIOR AFRICA DIRECTOR JENDAYI FRAZER
LONDON FOR GURNEY
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SUBJECT: POLITBURO MEMBERS QUIETLY CONSIDER POST-MUGABE ERA

Classified By: Political Section Chief Matt Harrington. Reasons: 1.5
(B) and (D).

Summary

1. (C) In an April 24 conversation with political section chief, ZANU-PF deputy political commissar Sikhanyiso Ndlovu said Politburo members are, for the first time, quietly discussing ways to ease President Mugabe out, but few are willing to confront the Zimbabwean President directly. According to Ndlovu, any solution must contain a "safe package" for Mugabe which protects him from prosecution and allows him to remain in Zimbabwe. ZANU-PF heavyweight Emmerson Mnangagwa is not well-liked by his senior ruling party colleagues, but Defense Minister Sydney Sekeramayi enjoys broad Politburo support as a potential Mugabe successor. End Summary.

2. (C) Political section chief met on April 24 with ZANU-PF deputy political commissar and Politburo member Sikhanyiso Ndlovu, at the latter's request. As in previous conversations with us, Ndlovu described himself as a voice of moderation on the Politburo who regularly tries to restrain the worst excesses of party hardliners. He claimed that, now that the election is over, he spends much less of his time on politics, concentrating instead on running his private educational institutes around the country. He did not inquire whether he had been placed on the list of those targeted by U.S. sanctions.

Talk of the post-Mugabe era

3. (C) Ndlovu reported that, for the first time since he joined the Politburo two years ago, members are talking openly among themselves about what comes after Mugabe, and how to ease the Zimbabwean president out. The Politburo is full of aspiring individuals who want their own chance at the top job, Ndlovu pointed out. Two options have been discussed informally among like-minded members. The first is to somehow invoke the section of the draft constitution rejected in 2000 creating the position of prime minister. Creation of such a post, giving it executive powers, and making the presidency a largely ceremonial position would be one way to preserve Mugabe's ego. Ndlovu stressed several times it was important to provide Mugabe with a "safe package" which protects him from prosecution and allows him to live out his remaining years in Zimbabwe. The second possibility under informal consideration is to engineer the appointment of two young, vigorous vice-presidents, who gradually are able to become the primary decision-makers.

No Support for Election Re-Run

4. (C) Polchief emphasized to Ndlovu that the USG did not consider Mugabe to have been legitimately elected, and we had come to the conclusion that the best way to restore legitimacy is via a transitional mechanism that leads to an opportunity for Zimbabweans to choose their leader in a genuinely free and fair process. Not surprisingly, Ndlovu replied that there is no support whatsoever on the Politburo for a rerun of the election, and certainly not one which is internationally supervised. He insisted that Zimbabweans are sick of the politicking and violence which accompany elections, and just wanted to move forward.

Hardliners vs. the moderates

5. (C) Ndlovu urged the USG not to paint everyone in ZANU-PF with one brush. The party includes moderates like himself who are trying to push for positive change from within. The problem is that the hardliners have the upper hand, and the moderates are not willing to stick their necks out. The one prominent exception is retired general Solomon Mujuru, who recently asked Mugabe during a Politburo meeting when he planned to step down. Mugabe respects and fears Mujuru, Ndlovu said, because the former armed forces chief still

retains the loyalty of many senior military commanders. Mujuru is also now independently wealthy, which gives him a freedom for maneuver that those whose livelihoods depend on ruling party beneficence do not have. Even Mujuru, though, is careful not to push too hard. Asked why Politburo members who disagreed with ruling party policies did not resign, Ndlovu seemed surprised by the question, and said one was appointed to the Politburo. Anyone who tried to resign, he said, would face very negative consequences.⁸

16. (C) Ndlovu described Speaker of Parliament -) and ZANU-PF Secretary for Administration -- Emmerson Mnangagwa as a ruling party hardliner & through and through⁸ who has little Politburo support, due primarily to his ruthlessness.

Asked whether there was anyone the Politburo would endorse as the next President, Ndlovu named Minister of Defense Sydney Sekeramayi.

Comment

17. (C) It is noteworthy that Politburo members are beginning to speak openly about the post-Mugabe era and even discussing means of nudging out the Zimbabwean president. It is unclear, however, whether those involved in such discussions have the capacity or gumption to translate talk into action. Ndlovu and his like-minded colleagues apparently have focused exclusively on how to prolong the ruling party's hold on power, minus Mugabe; forging a genuine reconciliation with the political opposition has apparently not figured in their calculations.

18. (C) Ndlovu, an Ndebele and a youthful-looking 65, is a shameless self-promoter whose soliloquies on his contributions to Zimbabwe's nation-building and educational system are painful to endure. (He previously served as Deputy Minister of Higher Education and founded a number of adult education institutes around the country.) It is unclear how much influence Ndlovu wields among his Politburo colleagues, but his key position as deputy political commissar and willingness to reach out to us make him worth staying in touch with. He is fond of the United States, with which he has longstanding connections -) he earned his doctorate in education at Syracuse in the 1970's, and several of his children live in the U.S. At least one child is a U.S. citizen who served in the Marine Corps and who, Ndlovu likes to recollect, got married in the Pentagon mess.

19. (C) Both of Ndlovu's succession scenarios are problematic. The move to ceremonial president does not address the issue of whether the autocratic Mugabe would continue to dictate policy behind the scenes. Nomination of two young vice presidents can occur only if Mugabe concurs, and would face strong resistance from Mnangagwa and other hard-liners unless they were the anointed successors. Ndlovu's scenarios sound to us more like wishful thinking than the likely way ahead.

SULLIVAN